



Revitalizing Local Wisdom through Fictional Texts: Enhancing Reading Comprehension in Indonesian Primary Classrooms

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill in early education, yet many Indonesian primary students struggle with it due to instructional materials that are culturally distant and pedagogically static. This study aims to develop a fictional reading module grounded in *kearifan lokal* (local wisdom) from Bone, South Sulawesi, using the Four-D development model: Define, Design, Develop, and Disseminate. The module incorporates the folklore of *Goa Mampu*, embedding moral values and regional identity within narrative texts designed for fourth-grade students. Validation involved expert reviews and field testing in a local elementary school. Results showed the materials achieved high validity (mean expert score: 3.8/4.0), strong effectiveness (mean post-test score: 87%), and high practicality based on teacher and student responses. Students demonstrated marked improvements in literal, inferential, and critical reading comprehension. Beyond academic gains, the module strengthened learners' cultural awareness and engagement. This research underscores the pedagogical value of integrating localized, story-based content into national curricula, particularly in multicultural education systems. It also highlights the role of culturally responsive materials in promoting equitable literacy outcomes. The findings contribute to a growing movement for curriculum contextualization in educational contexts of the Global South.

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Introduction

The ability to read and understand is the primary foundation in the basic education process, which has broad implications for the academic success of students at the next level. Reading is not only the activity of identifying words and sentences, but also includes the ability to think critically, draw conclusions, understand implicit meanings, and assess the reliability and moral value of the text read. Recent studies have confirmed that effective reading learning does not only rely on the technical aspects of reading skills, but must also consider the socio-cultural context of learners (Snow & Matthews, 2016; Kim, 2020). In this context, reading becomes a social and cultural activity that is influenced by the learner's background, including their mother tongue, local values, and traditions that they inherited from childhood. However, the basic education system in various regions of Indonesia still does not fully facilitate these needs. Textbooks used in elementary schools are often generic, centered on urban culture, and provide minimal accommodation for local narratives that are closely tied to the daily lives of students in the region.

In areas such as Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, which is rich in cultural heritage and folklore, the disparity between formal teaching materials and the social background of students is a significant factor contributing to low motivation and reading comprehension. Although students in Bone grow up in an ecosystem of strong cultural values, such as the local wisdom of *Goa Mampu*, these experiences rarely appear in the teaching materials they consume at school. As a result, they find it difficult to relate the content of the reading to their life experiences and local knowledge. This finding aligns with the research of Gay (2018) and Banks et al. (2021), who affirm that the absence of students' culture in learning contributes to weak engagement and lower learning achievement. Thus, there is a need for a pedagogical intervention that integrates the richness of local culture into teaching materials, particularly for highly contextual and interpretive reading comprehension skills.

The international literature on culturally responsive pedagogy has shown high effectiveness in increasing the participation and understanding of students from historically marginalized communities in the national education system (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages educators to use students' cultures, experiences, and languages as the primary foundation in the learning process. In the Indonesian context, this aligns with the

spirit of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes personalization of learning and character development through local content. Unfortunately, although normatively recognized, the practice of developing teaching materials based on local wisdom remains very limited, especially in the form of professionally designed and tested fictional texts aimed at improving reading comprehension competence.

Within this framework, this research was conducted with the primary objective of developing teaching materials for fictional texts based on Bone folklore, specifically Goa Mampu, to enhance the reading comprehension skills of fourth-grade elementary school students. This study employs the Four-D (Define, Design, Develop, Disseminate) development model, which is considered suitable for producing educational products that are not only theoretically valid but also practical and effective for use in real-world learning. The main innovation of this study lies in the integration of local narratives into fictional text formats, which are adapted to national literacy standards and designed to be visually appealing through the use of digital technology. This research not only offers a solution to the low achievement of basic literacy but also proposes a new paradigm in curriculum design that is more contextual and rooted in local culture.

Theoretical review

Reading Comprehension in Elementary Education

The ability to read comprehension at the elementary education level is an essential indicator in assessing students' readiness to face the complexity of cross-disciplinary knowledge. More than just understanding the literal meaning of a text, reading comprehension involves a series of cognitive processes such as drawing conclusions, recognizing relationships between sentences, identifying implicit messages, and evaluating the moral or ideological meaning of reading (Afflerbach et al., 2015). At the elementary school level, the National Reading Panel (2000) has established that effective reading instruction should include literal, inferential, critical, and reflective skills. Contemporary research, such as that conducted by McNamara & Magliano (2018), confirms that low reading comprehension skills are often rooted in a lack of linkage between reading content and learners' personal experiences, which leads to weak schematic activation. In this context, the selection of contextually and emotionally relevant reading texts is a crucial element that has

not been fully accommodated in the conventional curriculum in Indonesia, especially in areas with high local cultural wealth.

Teaching Materials Based on Local Wisdom

Local wisdom is defined as the traditional values that are lived and inherited within a particular community, reflecting human identity, ethics, and relationships with their environment (Geertz, 1983; Hoppers, 2002). In the realm of education, the integration of local wisdom into teaching materials has great potential not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a means of cultural preservation. Research by Subakir et al. (2021) demonstrates that incorporating local folklore into reading learning not only increases students' interest but also fosters their appreciation for the noble values inherent in ancestral cultures. In addition, locally based teaching materials enrich the learning experience by providing a familiar context for students, thus facilitating the process of constructing meaning and minimizing linguistic and cultural barriers. In Indonesia, several studies, such as those conducted by Anggraini and Kusniarti (2015), emphasize the urgency of developing textbooks based on local wisdom to form an inclusive national character that is firmly rooted in local values. However, this development is still limited to informative texts and has not significantly impacted fictional texts, which possess a higher imaginative and affective power in shaping literacy experiences.

Culturally Responsive Approach in Literacy

The concept of *culturally responsive pedagogy*, introduced by Geneva Gay (2010) and further developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014), has become one of the most influential theoretical foundations in multicultural education reform. This approach encourages teachers to understand student culture as a primary force that should serve as the foundation for designing effective learning instruction. In the context of literacy, this approach is realized through the selection of texts that reflect the cultural values of students, the use of familiar everyday language, and the recognition of their life experiences as part of learning resources. Paris and Alim (2017) expand this discourse by proposing a *culturally sustaining pedagogy* approach that not only responds to students' culture but also actively nurtures and empowers them in the classroom. The implementation of this approach in teaching reading can increase students' self-identification, confidence, and depth of understanding because they feel culturally engaged and valued. In the context of multiethnic and

multilingual Indonesia, this approach is highly relevant; however, there remains a lack of representation in the concrete form of developing teaching materials that can be replicated and validated academically.

Method

This study employs a research and development approach, utilizing the Four-D (Define, Design, Develop, Disseminate) model developed by Thiagarajan, Semmel & Semmel (1974). This model was chosen because it provides a systematic framework for designing educational products that are not only valid and in accordance with theoretical standards but can also be implemented practically in the classroom and proven to be effective in improving learning outcomes. The advantage of this model lies in its iterative nature, which allows researchers to continuously revise teaching materials based on expert validation and field feedback. In the context of this research, the product developed is in the form of teaching materials for fictional texts based on Bone folklore—especially the legend of *Goa Mampu*—which aims to improve the reading comprehension ability of grade IV elementary school students. This research was conducted over a semester at one of the State Elementary Schools in Bone Regency, involving 40 students as the primary subjects and subject teachers as the secondary collaborators.

The first stage in the Four-D model is Define, which involves identifying needs and diagnosing problems through classroom observation, curriculum analysis, and interviews with teachers. The study's results showed that the majority of students struggled to understand narrative texts, particularly in drawing conclusions and connecting the main ideas across paragraphs. Additionally, the teaching materials used do not accurately represent the local context, and there are few illustrations to support students' visual understanding. This stage also involves analyzing student characteristics and mapping relevant basic competencies outlined in the 2013 Curriculum for the grade IV elementary school level. Furthermore, in the Design stage, the researcher designed an initial prototype of teaching materials in the form of print and digital modules using the Canva platform. The structure of the modules is based on the classical narrative framework (orientation, complications, resolution, and moral message). It is complemented by visual illustrations, a glossary of local vocabulary, and a leveled comprehension exercise aligned with Bloom's taxonomy.

The Develop stage includes the process of product validation by three experts: media experts, linguists, and subject matter experts. Each validator assesses

aspects of content feasibility, language, appearance, and suitability in relation to the student's level of cognitive development. The average score of the validation results fell within the "very valid" category (3.8 out of 4.0 on the Likert scale), indicating that the teaching materials are worth conducting field trials. After revisions based on validator input, the teaching materials were implemented in a limited trial with 10 students and then continued with a main trial involving 30 additional students. The instruments used to collect effectiveness data include narrative text-based reading comprehension tests, student engagement observation sheets, and questionnaires assessing student and teacher responses to the use of teaching materials. Data analysis was conducted in a quantitative descriptive manner by calculating pre-test and post-test scores, and then using the gain score formula to calculate the gain scores.

In the last stage, Disseminate, the revised and validated teaching materials are then disseminated to teachers in partner schools through the MGMP forum (Subject Teacher Deliberation) and made available in digital format, allowing for broader access by educators in the Bone area and its surroundings. This stage is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of product use in a real-world context and as a contribution to the locality-based school literacy movement. Overall, the methodology of this research emphasizes not only the validity of the product but also the harmonious integration of local cultural values with an evidence-based pedagogical approach, so that the resulting product is not only innovative but also adaptive to the needs of multicultural education.

Results

The research results are presented in three dimensions: (1) the validity of the teaching material based on expert assessments, (2) its effectiveness in improving reading comprehension through pre-test and post-test comparisons, and (3) its practicality based on student responses.

Validation of Teaching Material

The material developed was evaluated by three experts representing media, language, and material domains. The scoring used a Likert scale from 1 (not valid) to 4 (very valid). Table 1 presents the aggregated validation scores.

Table 1. Validation Results of the Developed Teaching Material

No	Aspect Assessed	Validator 1	Validator 2	Validator 3	Mean Score	Category
1	Content Suitability	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.8	Very Valid
2	Language Clarity	3.8	4.0	3.7	3.83	Very Valid
3	Presentation	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.87	Very Valid
4	Visual Illustration	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.87	Very Valid

Source: analysis data, 2025

The validation results from three expert reviewers indicate that the developed reading materials meet high-quality standards in all assessed components. The mean score of 3.8 across content, language, presentation, and illustration dimensions falls within the "very valid" category. This strong evaluation confirms that the material is not only pedagogically appropriate but also responsive to the cognitive and affective needs of fourth-grade students. The highest scores were observed in the presentation and illustration aspects (3.87), which suggests that the visual layout and narrative structure were particularly effective in supporting student comprehension. These findings align with studies that emphasize the importance of multimodal design in early literacy instruction (Mayer, 2009; Kim, 2020), particularly when working with diverse learners. The language used in the texts also received favorable scores, reflecting clarity and readability. This aspect is critical, as linguistic complexity is often a barrier for young readers in rural contexts (Pretorius & Spaul, 2016). Therefore, the validation process not only certifies the feasibility of the product but also ensures that the material aligns with both technical and cultural dimensions of instructional quality.

Reading Comprehension Improvement

A pre-test and post-test were administered to assess the effectiveness of the developed material in improving students' reading comprehension. The average score increased significantly, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Test Type	Mean Score	Minimum	Maximum	Competency Category
Pre-Test	49.00	30.00	70.00	Low
Post-Test	87.00	75.00	100.00	High
Gain	0.74	-	-	High Effect Size

Source: analysis data, 2025

The significant increase in students' post-test scores compared to their pre-test performance reflects the effectiveness of the developed material in improving reading comprehension. The mean pre-test score of 49.00, which falls below the

Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM), underscores the baseline difficulty students experienced in understanding textual content. After the intervention, the mean post-test score reached 87.00, surpassing the competency threshold with all students scoring above 70. This performance gain reflects not only quantitative improvement but also qualitative transformation in students' ability to comprehend narrative structure, draw inferences, and extract moral messages from texts. The normalized gain score of 0.74 indicates a "high effect size" according to Hake's (1998) benchmark, positioning the intervention as a robust educational tool. The implication is that localized, culturally familiar content—when well designed—can bridge the comprehension gap often faced by students in peripheral regions. This echoes the conclusions of Snow & Matthews (2016), who emphasized contextual familiarity as a key factor in facilitating text processing and inferential reasoning among early-grade readers.

Student Response to Learning Material

To evaluate the practicality and emotional impact of the material, students were asked to respond to a four-item questionnaire assessing the relevance of the content, the appeal of the illustrations, the clarity of the text, and the motivational effects of the material.

Table 3. Summary of Student Response Questionnaire

Indicator	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Content relevance	91%	Very Good
Illustration appeal	94%	Very Good
Text clarity	89%	Very Good
Reading motivation	90%	Very Good

Source: analysis data, 2025

Students' affective responses to the learning materials demonstrate a high level of acceptance, engagement, and motivation. Over 90% of students rated the material as highly relevant, visually appealing, and easy to understand. The strongest response was in the illustration dimension (94%), confirming that the use of local visual elements—such as depictions of Bone architecture, traditional clothing, and symbolic motifs—helped students connect more personally with the story. The clarity of text also received positive feedback (89%), which is crucial in ensuring that students with varying literacy levels can access and process the information independently. Moreover, 90% of students expressed increased motivation to read more stories rooted in local culture. This is particularly important in the Indonesian

context, where students' reading habits are often limited due to a lack of engaging and culturally relevant materials. These findings align with Gay's (2010) theory of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasizes that students learn best when instructional content reflects their lived realities. Thus, the material not only enhanced cognitive outcomes but also succeeded in cultivating intrinsic interest in reading—an essential foundation for long-term literacy development.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that integrating local wisdom into fictional reading materials significantly enhances students' reading comprehension while also improving their cultural identity and emotional engagement with texts. The high validation score across content, language, presentation, and illustration suggests that the material was well-designed and aligned with students' developmental stages and sociocultural context. These findings support the notion that educational innovation must be measured not only through standardized effectiveness but also through relevance and resonance with learners' lived experiences. In culturally diverse nations such as Indonesia, this study contributes evidence that culturally embedded pedagogy is not a luxury—it is a necessity for equitable learning outcomes.

When compared to previous research, the effectiveness of the developed material is consistent with global and national trends in literacy instruction. Studies by Gay (2010), Ladson-Billings (2014), and Paris & Alim (2017) emphasize that culturally responsive teaching fosters greater student motivation, comprehension, and identity formation. In the Indonesian context, Subakir et al. (2021) and Anggraini & Kusniarti (2015) demonstrated that texts rooted in local narratives improve reading retention and student empathy. This study affirms and extends those findings by showing that even in a relatively underserved rural region such as Bone, localized stories like *Goa Mampu* can stimulate higher-order thinking and reading gains. Moreover, by incorporating illustrations, moral reflections, and student-centered exercises, the material addressed not only literal comprehension but also inferential and evaluative thinking—dimensions crucial in developing critical literacy.

The implications of this research extend beyond instructional material design; it challenges the homogeneity of national curricula and proposes a model for pluralizing education through localized content. Many Indonesian classrooms still rely heavily on central-government-issued textbooks that fail to reflect the cultural

heterogeneity of the archipelago. By contrast, this study offers a replicable model in which folklore, regional ethics, and local language fragments are transformed into meaningful learning texts. This contributes not only to academic development but also to cultural preservation and civic identity. Such an approach aligns with the framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which seeks not merely to respond to students' cultures but to maintain and promote them within educational spaces (Paris & Alim, 2017). It demonstrates that the classroom can serve as both a site of literacy and a vessel of heritage transmission.

This study also contributes to theory by bridging the gap between literacy pedagogy and cultural studies. It reinforces the constructivist view of learning, wherein students build understanding through connection with familiar contexts. The success of the reading module reinforces the schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), which posits that comprehension is enhanced when readers can relate new information to existing cognitive frameworks. The emotional proximity students felt toward the *Goa Mampu* narrative served as an entry point into deeper interpretive work. Thus, local content does not merely adorn the curriculum—it empowers it by fostering deeper textual engagement and affirming identity.

Despite its strengths, this study has certain limitations. It was conducted in a single school with a specific cultural backdrop, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or student populations. The study also focused primarily on cognitive outcomes (reading comprehension scores) without a longitudinal assessment of how such materials might impact students' long-term reading habits or cultural awareness. Future studies could expand this work by exploring comparative designs across provinces, integrating multimedia versions of folklore, or analyzing the impact of such materials on students' emotional literacy, moral reasoning, or intergenerational dialogue within their families.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the development of fictional reading materials based on the *Goa Mampu* legend from the Bone Regency significantly enhances reading comprehension skills among fourth-grade elementary students. Utilizing the Four-D development model, the research successfully produced a pedagogically sound and culturally grounded teaching module that demonstrated high levels of validity, effectiveness, and practicality. The marked improvement in students' post-test comprehension scores and the positive affective responses observed during

implementation affirm the transformative power of culturally responsive pedagogy in early-grade literacy instruction. The findings clearly demonstrate that when learners encounter texts rooted in their own cultural narratives, their ability to interpret, reflect, and engage with reading content improves significantly. This validation of schema activation and identity-affirming content supports the constructivist view of learning as socially and culturally situated. The reading material also succeeded in transmitting moral values and regional pride, making it a dual instrument of academic development and cultural empowerment.

The implications of this research are both practical and systemic. Practically, the study provides a model for developing localized instructional materials that educators in various cultural settings across Indonesia and other multicultural contexts can adapt. It encourages teachers and curriculum designers to leverage indigenous narratives not as supplemental content but as core components of the literacy curriculum. Systemically, the research challenges centralized, one-size-fits-all textbook paradigms by demonstrating the efficacy of context-sensitive materials. Theoretically, this study contributes to the evolving discourse on culturally sustaining pedagogy and literacy education in the Global South by providing empirical evidence that cultural alignment in texts fosters not only cognitive gains but also affective and ethical engagement. As such, this work advocates for a reorientation of literacy development strategies to one that embraces the richness of local culture as a legitimate and powerful driver of educational quality and equity.

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